

Summer 06 Newsletter

2006 ELECTION

R A Councillor, Bob Harper, was re-elected with 57% of the vote. The R A group of councillors for Tattenhams and Nork remains at six – we have as many councillors as the Liberal Democrats and Labour put together.

I wish to thank everyone that was involved, including our friends at Nork who were able to assist in canvassing and telling due to the unopposed election of their own candidate, Councillor Brian Stead.

As usual, the whole of Tattenhams Ward was canvassed. Notes of issues raised – 140 comments in total – on the doorstep have been compiled and passed on for action. If you have an issue and weren't in when we called, do contact a committee member or one of the councillors – see the back page for contact details.

It is instructive to look at the types of issues raised:

Highways Issues – 39%	Road Safety Improvements – 10%	Police & Safety – 10%
Refuse & Recycling - 7%	Planning Issues – 6%	Leisure Centre – 5%
Street Cleaning & Litter – 4%	Parking at Tattenham Corner – 3%	Housing – 3%
	All Other Issues – 13%	

We are not surprised with the high score given to transportation issues, as the response from the County Council is very poor. We have urged the contractors to get cracking on road repairs, specifically in the worst areas such as Garlichill Road. The road we had the most comments about during canvassing is Preston Lane, not actually in Tattenhams but in neighbouring Preston ward. We have received confirmation that it will be resurfaced – but not until September.

Surrey's roads have been in the national press, and R A Councillor Nick Harrison reports on the row, and his views on roads and highways after a year at the County Council.

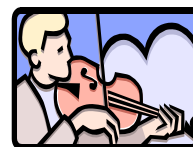
Continuing the roads theme, we also include an article on the 'Speedwatch' scheme, which is a way for local residents to take back some control to deal with speeding traffic on busy local roads. The scheme is quite controversial. Some people are not keen on it because they feel it's the job of the police and not the public to deal with speeding. Do make up your own mind – and let me know if you are interested in participating.

John Butcher
Chairman

MUSIC IN THE PARK



SUNDAY 16th JULY



This ever-popular event in Nork Park – adjacent to the Community Centre - is a family affair with something for everyone, not just musical entertainment.

Food and drink are available at reasonable prices or you can bring your own picnic.

Don't forget a rug and/or chairs. Definitely an occasion not to miss!

SO WHAT IS WRONG WITH OUR ROADS?

Finally, it's Hit the Press

Surrey's problems led to headlines in the national and local press – see the box opposite. But what are the issues and how do we solve them?

Just How Bad are the Roads?

We probably all think the condition of the roads is getting worse, but is that actually the case?

The Government's accredited surveyor agrees with you. The official statistics are that maintenance 'should be considered' for 13% of principal (A) roads, 20% of 'non-principal classified' (B) roads, and 16% of unclassified (the majority of our suburban residential) roads. And it is getting worse, with the percentages in the second two categories increasing by 3 to 4 % in the year.

Do We Spend Enough Money?

Probably not. There have been many years of underfunding of the roads, whilst demand and wear on the existing network has increased through extra traffic volumes and heavier lorries. A particular problem in our suburban area in Tattenhams is that many of the roads were built at around the same time, and are therefore all reaching the end of their life together.

Although it may seem that we all pay enough in council tax, central government grants provide more of the income required to pay for local council services. Unfortunately, Surrey is thought of as a rich county, and receives less grant per head of population than any other county or city, except for rural Dorset! And even if the County Council wanted to spend more, for instance on roads, then council tax-capping prevents it from doing so.

In addition, central government usually awards capital sums towards road schemes in the County's transport plan. This usually amounts to about £20 million a year – but this year the County received a nil grant, and has been forced to borrow money to pay for this work.

So with these pressures, you may think all the more important to spend money wisely? Of course.

Surrey Highways Partnership (SHiP Contract)

Four years ago, the County Council took back control of day-to-day minor maintenance (fixing potholes, repairing trip hazards in the pavements etc) from the local boroughs. This had worked well in Reigate & Banstead and in most other areas – the borough councils pick litter, clean the streets, cut the grass, and therefore have many eyes and ears close to the ground to spot the issues. Borough Council staff also knew which problems needed to be fixed as a priority and which could safely be left.

However, in some parts of the County this division of duties did not operate well. Therefore this work was packaged together with the major roadworks and new schemes, and all was awarded in a long-term contract (SHiP) to two major companies - Carillion in the east of the county where we are, and Ringway in the west.

It is a 'partnership' contract where in theory the contractors undertake to keep the roads up to a certain standard, measured through agreed 'Key Performance Indicators' (KPI's), and if these indicators are met then the contract is automatically renewed. As part of this arrangement, the County Council downscaled its staff involved in detailed monitoring of the contract.

The contract's KPI's were drawn up to focus on what were problems at the time the contract was signed, mainly concerns about quality and timeliness of major contracts. There is little which is directed at the cost effectiveness and efficiency of the works undertaken. Amazingly enough, the County Council cannot change these indicators and the contract cannot be modified without the agreement of the contractors!

So What Are Our Councillors Doing?

A good question. The simple truth is that we all know the service isn't working - it's the most frequent topic for complaint from our residents. Firstly, we've had a blazing row about the matter!

The Transport portfolio at the Council is held by Cllr. Helyn Clack from Dorking, and the service is subject to scrutiny by a select committee of backbenchers (drawn in proportion from each of the political parties), with Cllr Jan Mason from Epsom and Ewell representing the Residents' Associations.

The report on Carillion (see panel below) was kept secret for many months from the select committee, which has now called for the contract to be terminated because of a breakdown of trust. The financial settlement from Carillion is being presented as a positive result, rather than what it is – a recognition of failure. (Note the reported problems affect only the Carillion and not the Ringway part of the project.)

At the last full meeting of all Councillors, the Leader of the County Council, Cllr Nick Skellett from Oxted, was forced to step in and shamefacedly acknowledge that the condition of the roads is not meeting public expectations, and in defending calls for Cllr Clack's resignation, has stepped up to take personal responsibility for getting the problem fixed.

So far, Carillion have changed their contract manager, but said nothing publicly. Cllrs Skellett and Clack are due to set out their proposals for the contract later in July.

It's Official: Road Workers are Paid to do Virtually Nothing

The Daily Telegraph, Daily Mail and local papers reported on a document leaked to the trade press publication, *Construction News*. This revealed that Carillion workers on the Surrey roads contract laboured for just 57 minutes in one day.

The gang was reported to have "left the Esher depot at 8:36am and had done virtually nothing by 10:30am after visiting the baker's and the bank." They returned to collect three kerbstones and arrived at their work site where they "moved off, driving around, stopping and chatting, drinking tea and reading the paper". The kerbstones were finally laid between 1pm and 2pm. Then it was off to the baker's again, a trip to another shop and a chat before returning to the depot at 3:40pm.

Carillion has now agreed to knock £1.1 million off last year's bill and to carry out work worth £750,000 for free over the next two years. A council spokesman says its report "doesn't represent the whole contract and we have been more than happy with Carillion's response since these concerns were raised."

So what is the Position in Reigate & Banstead?

Earlier this year I sought out statistics on road repairs in our borough area. Incredibly, it was claimed that there were only 200 faults defined as category 1A, being a pothole or similar greater than 40mm (1½ inches) in the whole borough in an 8 month period, and three quarters of these had been repaired within 24 hours. This is cloud-cuckoo land, and doesn't reflect my experience where potholes of this size are not repaired for many months.

It then came to light that these performance statistics are only recorded when the contractor undertake their own inspections of each road, generally only every six months! So there can be a pothole for anything up to six months before it starts to be recorded in the statistics used to measure performance under the contract!

Looking at less deep potholes, even this way of reporting through rosy-tinted spectacles, shows the situation is poor, with only about one-third of category 2 faults getting repaired at all, and only half of those on time. Many of our local roads were originally just concrete, and at some stage it was decided to put a thinnish layer of bitumen over the top. This is now what is cracking up and producing the potholes, down to the concrete base. Since the tarmac layer is often not 40mm deep, these potholes do not meet the category 1A safety threshold for so-called priority attention.

The contract states "the management, control and deployment within specific areas of all resources available will be solely at the discretion of the contractor". So, unlike the days when the Borough managed the process, your councillors and the County Council's officers have no ability to direct the contractors to priority areas. This is also why you often find contractors have repaired one or two potholes, but left others nearby.

Road Improvement Schemes

One of the other problems with the SHiP contract is that the cost of road improvement schemes (such as pedestrian crossings and road tables) has increased very substantially – many times above the rate of inflation. Many of the schemes seem over-engineered. Partnership should mean that the contractor brings new ideas to the table to save money and be more cost-effective; this has not happened.

There is consequently less money available to spend on the danger spots we are all familiar with. There is a list of schemes in the borough which will take about 8-10 years to complete. We have been waiting in the queue about 4 years to start on what is regarded as the Residents' Association's highest priority – the project for safety improvements in Great Tattenhams. It looks like the design stage for this project should be completed this year, with actual construction to follow.

What Should be Done?

It's easy to criticise, but how do we get out of this hole?

- The outcome of road audits and investigations should be made public.
- The SHiP contract is not fit for purpose; a partnership approach works with the right contractor for complex engineering projects, but not for basic road works.
- Carillion do not have open systems and effective management. They should go.
- The management and supervision of contracts needs to be completely revised.
- The whole process of planning, ordering, monitoring and paying for road works needs to be reviewed and changed.
- Efficiency, cost effectiveness and value for money needs to be demonstrated at all times.
- Focus on the detail – why does it cost so much for a resident to have a crossover built, compared to neighbouring authorities? Why do workmen travel piecemeal from area to area, instead of fixing all the problems in a set of neighbouring streets? Why do workmen need to go back and forward from their depot in the day – bring all the materials required at the start.
- Senior county officials should listen to their junior staff – if needs be through an anonymous survey. These staff know what the problems are, but in the past have been afraid to speak out whilst job numbers have been under threat.
- The number of council road stewards on the ground should be restored, with savings to be made by reducing the number of people involved in investigating and designing schemes, many of which will never reach the light of day.
- Local councillors and residents' associations should be able to influence priorities – they should not be set by the contractors. The Boroughs should be given back a role in maintenance work.

What are the Local Issues which Need the Most Attention?

The Residents' Association's surveys, and feedback during canvassing, identified the following:

Resurfacing/ Major Patching: Preston Lane, Hillside, and Burgh Wood.

Potholes: Almost too many to list, but among the worst are Garlichill Road, Rosebushes, Green Curve, Shawley Way, Great Tattenhams, Nork Way, Beech Grove and Headley Drive.

Tattenham Corner Parking: The decision to charge for parking at Tattenham Corner, taken against our advice, has created extra problems for residents. The car park is available to shoppers, but at the expense of all day parking in residential roads by commuters. We have asked the council to look at small changes to yellow lines, so that parking at a few dangerous spots is eliminated.

Other Parking Issues: It is proving difficult to park in a few parts of the ward, including Shawley Crescent, Chetwode Road, St Leonards Road and Long Walk. We have pressed the Housing Trust to implement its promise to provide 500 new off-street parking bays.

Verges: In St Leonards Road these have been destroyed by parking. We have asked that the Council take action when builders use them during their works.

Trees: The Council has agreed that the 77 protected lime trees in The Drive require maintenance.

In conclusion, the R A and your councillors will continue to press for changes in the overall system, and to deal with specific issues. Please continue to report problems, either through the website, or to the County Council Contact Centre on 08456 – 009009.

Nick Harrison

RESIDENTS TAKE AIM AT SPEEDING DRIVERS

Speeding motorists are being targeted by residents who have joined forces with police to launch a 'speed watch' initiative. The aim is to tackle antisocial behaviour on the county's roads.

Community Speedwatch is run by local volunteers with the purpose of re-educating drivers about the dangers of speeding, as well as addressing residents' concerns, improving the quality of life for communities and reducing traffic noise and pollution.

In Reigate & Banstead, volunteers have been trained in Chipstead, and schemes for south Reigate and for Horley are in the pipeline. One of the first schemes in the county is in Brockham, where the average speed through the village used to be 49mph. This has been reduced to 41mph in a year, through the Speedwatch scheme.

Police View

Jerry Westerman, East Surrey neighbourhood police superintendent, said: "We spend a great deal of time listening to communities and one concern that they frequently raise is about vehicles speeding through their neighbourhoods. Community Speedwatch is a great way for us to work together with communities to target these concerns and it gives residents the opportunity to get actively involved in helping to make Surrey's roads safer.

"The role of enforcement is, of course, still one for Surrey Police and we will continue to take action against speeding drivers on our roads."

So What's Involved?

- At least six volunteers, who contribute a minimum of an hour a week, are required to set up a Speedwatch scheme.
- Volunteers work depending on their availability. The aim is for the team to monitor drivers' speeds at least once a day.
- Speed detection guns and reflective jackets are supplied by the Police, who also give training on how to use the speedguns, how to monitor the speed of vehicles safely, and advice on dealing with inquiries from road users.
- Volunteers work in pairs at locations (within 30 or 40mph limit zones), selected by the community in consultation with Surrey Police.
- They record speeds of motorists in a log and offenders travelling at excess speeds are identified. Details are passed on to the police.
- The motorists are sent a 'yellow card', which is a letter of advice asking for their co-operation in the future.
- A maximum of two warning letters are sent to offenders. If they are caught speeding again, police will target them for enforcement.
- The aim, however, is for the presence of the Speedwatch volunteers out on the streets to make drivers think twice about their driving habits and slow down.

Superintendent Westerman added: "What the Speedwatch initiative is primarily about is re-educating drivers and giving them a chance to think about and change their driving behaviour. It has been very well received by residents in the areas where it has already been launched and I would encourage anyone who is interested in starting up a scheme to get in contact."

Great Tattenhams.... And Elsewhere?

Some residents in Great Tattenhams have come forward to set up a local scheme, but more are needed to get it up and working. Ideally, the police think that residents from a number of local roads where there is a problem could work together – for example, Tattenham Way and Fir Tree Road have been mentioned.

You may have your own views of a local road which should be targeted, and you may be able to help as a volunteer. If you are interested, the R A Chairman, John Butcher, or Councillor Nick Harrison can put you in touch – see the last page for contact details.

(We acknowledge this article draws on information provided by the *Surrey Mirror*)

UPDATE ON BANSTEAD SPORTS CENTRE

We wrote about this in some depth in our last newsletter. Since then, the public consultation has concluded, and its findings published.

There were almost 1,400 responses to the questionnaire – 60% from Banstead (as opposed to users of Donyngs in Redhill and the Horley centres), representing 50% of the Banstead Centre's users. In addition, the Save Our Sports Centre (SOS) group presented a petition from 1,000 local residents.

The responses clearly present the Borough Council leaders with a quandary. The strong adverse reaction from local people has been a surprise to them. There is a great deal of affection for the existing centre, with many saying that it requires only a face-lift. There is a strong consensus that a Leisure Centre needs to include a swimming pool, whereas the plans for the Beacon alternative have focussed on 'dry' facilities – a Sports Hall and Gym.

Because of this, the final decision has been delayed. The Residents' Association still thinks that three key series of questions are unanswered:

- Is the existing building fit for purpose? Is it past its useful life? What facilities are missing in the existing centre?
- If a new 'dual use' centre is to be built on the Beacon School, can the existing hours of operation for the public be maintained? Can the needs of the school for use of the facility, and their obligations to maintain the security of their school site be reconciled with the wish of the public for continued extended opening?
- The existing Leisure Centre has extensive parking facilities, which are on occasion completely full. How would adequate parking be provided in a dual use centre at the Beacon? Would it require extensive use of nearby roads or construction of a car park on the Recreation Ground?

BLOOD DONORS

The National Blood Service regularly visits this area. Donation sessions are held in St Paul's Church Hall in Warren Road, Nork, and the Rainbow Sports Centre in Epsom, as well as mobile units at Asda, Banstead High Street and Depot Road, Epsom car parks.

Details can be found at www.blood.co.uk. Or you can ring 0845 – 771 1711 for details. Alternatively, go to BBC Ceefax page 465.

Blood is needed every day by patients in hospital. It is vital in dealing with emergencies, planned operations like hip replacements, and to treat serious diseases like cancer. It's easy to give, and doesn't take long.

If you are between 17 and 60 and in good health please give this subject serious consideration.

